

Fruit

There are five major fruit and berry crops grown in the Garden State: apples, blueberries, cranberries, peaches, and strawberries. During the 2003 growing season, localized frost damage was reported in some peach and apple orchards around the state. Spring rains delayed peach blooms and interrupted strawberry harvest. Frequent rains during the summer months also delayed blueberry and peach harvest. Apple and cranberry production was above average with no major disease or harvest problems.

Total production of the five fruit and berry crops during 2003 amounted to 200 million pounds, up 8 percent from the previous year's production of 185 million pounds. Value of utilized production of these crops totaled \$92.6 million, a loss of \$776,000 from the 2002 total of \$93.4 million. Value of utilized production was higher for apples and cranberries, while blueberries, peaches, and strawberries declined from the previous year.

During 2003, among all major fruit and berry producing states in the nation, New Jersey ranked second in blueberry production; fourth in cranberry production; fifth in peach production; and eighteenth in apple production. Ranking crops by value of production within the state resulted in blueberries ranked first with \$45.7 million. Peaches ranked second with \$24.2 million, while cranberries ranked third with \$15.1 million. Apples and strawberries ranked fourth and fifth with \$5.84 million and \$1.82 million, respectively.

This year's apple crop was favorable. Both quantity and quality of the crop were good. Total apple production, at 40 million pounds, was fully utilized. Compared with 2002, utilized production was up 8 million pounds, while season average price was down 3 cents a pound. The value of utilized production totaled \$5.8 million, up 4 percent from 2002. The leading apple producing county was Gloucester with 16 million pounds. Camden ranked second with 4.4 million pounds and Cumberland ranked third with 3.8 million pounds. Atlantic and Burlington counties ranked fourth and fifth with 2.5 million pounds and 2.2 million pounds, respectively.

Despite some frost damage and later than usual development, peach fruit set and sizing were good. Extremely wet weather during the summer adversely affected peach quality. Some harvested fruit began to rot before it reached the market. Early and mid-season prices were good. Late season prices dropped sharply due to abundant stocks that exceeded demand. Peach utilized production totaled 62 million pounds, up 5 million pounds from 2002. Season average price, at 39 cents per pound, was 5.2 cents lower than last year's price. Value of utilized production was \$24.2 million, 4 percent lower than 2002. Gloucester county was the leading county with 28.5 million pounds while Cumberland was second with 18 million pounds. Camden ranked third with 7.4 million pounds and Atlantic ranked fourth with 4.4 million pounds, followed closely by Burlington with 3.5 million pounds.

Cranberry growers in New Jersey produced a total of 480,000 barrels in 2003, an increase of 50,000 barrels from 2002. The value of production was \$15.1 million, up 10 percent from the \$13.7 million produced in 2002. Burlington county was the major cranberry producing area in the Garden State.

The 2003 total blueberry production of 41 million pounds was down 2 million pounds from 2002's record high production of 43 million pounds. Value of utilized production was \$45.7 million compared to 2002's value of \$46.8 million. Atlantic and Burlington counties were the leading blueberry producing areas. The season average price of \$1.14 per pound was up 3 percent from the \$1.11 per pound in 2002. This season average price for blueberries is the highest price on record that producers have ever received for the crop.

Strawberry production in 2003 showed a sharp decline from 2002. Production at 11,000 hundredweight was 31 percent less than in 2002. All production was utilized. The season average price was \$165 per hundredweight, up \$35 from 2002. This price was the highest price ever recorded in the state. The value of production was \$1.82 million, down 13 percent from the previous year.